LABOR CONTINUES TO FAIL TO REHABILITATE PRISONERS

Jodeen Carney MLA
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The Government is continuing to fail to provide enough rehabilitation programs for prisoners.

At the Estimates Committee hearing this evening, Shadow Minister for Correctional Services, Jodeen Carney, said the gap between the Minister’s rhetoric and the reality were exposed.

Also exposed was the Minister’s failure to prepare for even the most rudimentary questions about his portfolio.

“For instance, when asked how much of the entire $100m Correctional Services budget was spent in 2009-10, and will be spent in 2010-11 on rehabilitation, education and training programs in the Territory’s 2 jails, Minister McCarthy had to admit he did not know the answer,” Ms Carney said.

“This year’s budget provided an additional $7.7m for custodial services, of which $7.6m is allocated to the prisoners’ work camp at Tennant Creek, ($5.1m to construct and $2.5m for its operation).

“That means there’s barely any new money for expanding rehabilitation programs.

“Minister McCarthy has been talking about a ‘new era’ in Corrections for over 12 months, but it’s clear he doesn’t understand the importance of rehabilitating prisoners.

“This makes a mockery of the Minister’s claims he’s ‘increasing the rehabilitation of our prisoners’ (Hansard 29 Oct ’09).

“The Government’s hand on heart rhetoric isn’t matched by its actions.

“The total number of prisoners who participated in an alcohol treatment program in 2009/10 was 51.

“Last year, it was 111.

“The number of alcohol treatment programs is lamentable. At the Darwin jail, one program was run earlier this year, and another is planned later this month and there are only 12 places available.

“Given that Government members constantly talk about the link between alcohol, crime and imprisonment rates, Territorians have a right to think more programs exist. Clearly, there are not enough.

“Sex offender treatment programs are also poorly attended. As at May 2010 there were 171 sexual offenders in Territory prisons. Of those, only 42 completed sex offender programs.

“This calendar year, there have only been 2 sex offender treatment programs run in Darwin, with another planned later in the year. The program in Alice Springs stopped last year, and it’s uncertain if there will be any run this year.

“Government members talk increasingly about domestic violence, but it’s clear resources are not allocated to programs in our jails. In Darwin, only one program is scheduled, with only 12 places available. Last year, there were only 2 programs.

“Estimates has revealed that there is a huge gap between what the Government, and this Minister say, and what they do.

“Instead, all we see from this lot is meaningless media releases, shallow promises, and no commitment...
to rehabilitate prisoners.

"Any Government worth its salt would have significantly increased the Corrections budget and recourses to treatment and rehabilitation programs in key areas, such as alcohol, sex offending and domestic violence.

"But at least the Minister signalled a significant and long-overdue policy shift tonight.

"Previously this Government has refused to make domestic violence treatment programs mandatory, but tonight Gerry McCarthy said he supported such a move.

“It’s about time.”

(Tabled Documents attached)

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